

LEROY BEARS

BEARS ON A ROLL



The 2017 Leroy High School Bears.

Leroy photos by William Gray/Call News

Leroy hopes hot streak from last season continues this fall

BY ARTHUR L. MACK
alouismack@aol.com

It's a matter of unfinished business for the Leroy High Bears.

Last year, Leroy went through a midseason lull, losing a pair of heartbreakers to Clarke County (34-33) and Southern Choctaw (8-7) before reeling off five straight wins to get to the second round of the Class 2A playoffs before losing another heartbreaker to eventual state runner-up Aliceville, 36-33.

Bears coach Jason Massey said that the winning streak proved his team is close to getting back to the glory days of Leroy High football.

"It produced a lot of confidence," he said. "I think that was something that came from working and getting better every day, and as long as we do that, the wins and losses will take care of themselves."

Massey said the loss to Aliceville was tough, but hoped it would create momentum for this year.

"It was a good high school football game between two good ball teams, and it could have gone either way," he said. "They (Aliceville) were very talented and very well coached, and we just came up a little bit short. Our kids fought the whole time and battled the whole way. They did what we expected them to do. I told the kids I was proud of them, and hopefully our seniors set us in motion to accomplish bigger and better things in the future."

Although the Bears have 60 players out for football, some of them could very well play both ways. Massey, though, hopes not too many of his players have to see action

on both sides of the ball.

"Our goal is to play as many people as we can," he said. "But you won't know anything until you start practicing fast. But the fact that we have 60 kids out, that's something to be excited about, because it means some depth and we can work from there, and hopefully we'll have enough guys who can play."

Leroy lost seven starters on offense and six on defense, but Massey stopped short of calling it a rebuilding year, saying there were some who saw a lot of action who could step up and work their way into bigger roles.

"We have some guys that are going to have to step into bigger roles, and we definitely have some positions we have to look at," he said. "But I feel confident with the guys we have, that we should fill those roles."

Leroy's offense will be one where there will be some of everything, passing and scoring.

"We're going to do whatever it takes to score," said Massey. "Whether it means running the football, or throwing it. We've thrown it a lot here in the past, but we're going to do whatever we can to put up points."

Offensively, there is a three-man race at quarterback. Senior Nathan Taylor, junior Jeb Rice, and sophomore Kade Mosley. Taylor saw action in last year's game against Citronelle, while Rice played on the junior varsity last season and saw some action on the varsity. Mosley, meanwhile, is a transfer from Jackson.

The running game could be strong, with



Jason Massey

of those guys played in the rotation last year and have experience and all three of them are seniors."

The offensive line, according to Massey, is perhaps the strength of the team. There are four returning starters and two others who played some snaps. The four returning starters are seniors Jon Carr, Hank Roney, Dylan Stewart, and junior Chance Butts.

The two who played some snaps during 2016 are junior Jacob Clark and senior Tristan Weaver.

Defensively, the Bears are a work in progress.

"You can't tell about defense until you start putting pads on," Massey said.

junior Jontaye Peoples, freshman Kelston Fikes, and senior Declintae James carrying the load.

"These guys right there came out of spring ball and at that time were our top three guys," Massey said.

"At receiver, we have three guys that returned that played some last year—Daniel Waddill, Dawson McDaniels, and Matt Snow. All three

Seniors Cody Aspinwall and Jacob Brewer are two of the key returners on the defensive line, while there are also two returning starters at linebacker — Weaver and Tyler Wheat. Then there's junior Brady Smith, who played plenty during the season as well.

Two others that saw action last season and could challenge for starting roles are Nathan Taylor and Jacob Weaver.

As for the secondary, Massey said he is still trying to find people who can fill starting roles.

"We're still looking for a couple of guys, because we had some guys who graduated," he said. "But we have two guys who played corner last year in the rotation, Jontae Peoples and Prinis Snow."

Junior Fred Freeman, who came out during spring training, could also see action at cornerback, while at safety, James and Snow, as well as Fikes, could very well see plenty of action at safety in addition to playing offense.

"Declintae started for us last year at safety, and Matt played a pretty good bit in the secondary as well," said Massey. "Kelston played in the secondary for us during the spring."

Leroy's schedule, as it was last season, will be challenging. In the season opener on Sept. 1, the Bears are at Satsuma, then host Class 2A, Region 1 foe Washington County and Class 5A Citronelle in successive weeks. Four of the last five games are region battles.

"It's going to be a test, but hopefully, it'll make us better and prepared for what we're going to see," Massey said.

Veteran Hank Roney appreciates town's support

BY ARTHUR L. MACK
alouismack@aol.com

Leroy offensive lineman Hank Roney has seen a lot of things during his four years as a starter—from so-so seasons to going deep in the playoffs.

"It's changed a lot," he said. "When I was a freshman, I was kind of scared going up against people and I was just growing into it."

This year, after coming off a tough loss in the second round of the Class 2A playoffs, the 6-foot-1, 285-pound senior wants to help get the Bears back to their glory days when winning state championships were a habit.

"Everybody from the community loves to come out and watch us play football games," Roney said. "We want to get back to the state championship. Community support was great last year. Everybody who didn't have sons on the team came out (to watch us). Leroy High football is coming back."

Leroy suffered a mid-season lull, losing back-to-back heartbreakers to Clarke County and Southern Choctaw before reeling off five straight wins. The Bears made it to the second round of the playoffs, where they lost 36-33 to eventual state runner-up Aliceville.

The five-game winning streak gave Leroy some much-needed confidence.

"It really showed during practice," Roney said. "We had a lot of great leadership. We expected to go far in the playoffs, and came up a little short. But I would rather have lost to them (Aliceville) than anybody, because they went all the way to the state."

Roney said that so far, the summer has gone pretty well.

"It's been good," he said. "We've come together more as a team than in the past couple of years."

It also helps that there are other offensive linemen besides Roney coming back. There is Dylan Stewart, who like Roney is a senior and also started as a freshman. Roney said the offensive line has become like a family.

"It's all about coming together and being a brotherhood of one," he said.

That brotherhood will be a big key to the Bears' success if they expect to make it to the playoffs and beyond.

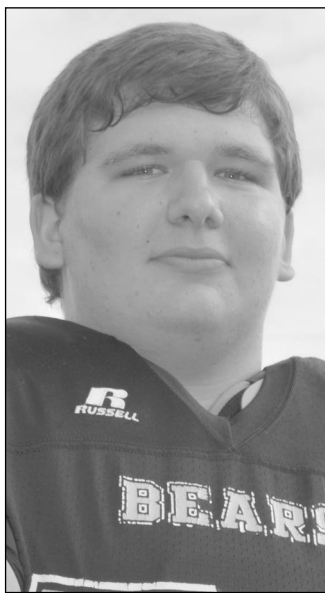
"All of our starters on the offensive line are back," he said. "The rest of the offense is doing pretty good. We have a good quarterback battle, and we did some 7-on-7 stuff. We played Jackson and a few Mobile teams."

With Leroy being in a tough region, especially with the likes of Washington County, Southern Choctaw and improved teams such as St. Luke's and Chickasaw,

Roney knows that looking ahead to any opponent could spell disaster. Hence, the emphasis will be to take each game as it

comes.

"It's one game at a time, and try to improve every game," he said.



Hank Roney



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